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ABSTRACT

Citizenship is defined as an informed and critical orientation that individuals bring to the examination of public affairs, an orientation that may or may not be supportive of established authority or prevailing views. It is argued that only through an interdisciplinary approach to the social studies curriculum can students properly be helped to understand social problems in all their complexities. Such an approach requires not only being open to the insight that various disciplines may offer in a given situation, but also viewing the content of the subject matter taught as inexorably linked with the process by which it is taught. Challenges to reforming the social studies curriculum are identified as community-parent and special interest groups, teacher preparation, student expectations, and student learning gains. A list of questions is provided that is designed to help those interested in curriculum reform to assess the environment in which reform is to occur. Such questions include: Are teachers prepared to initiate and implement such a curriculum? Who are the resisters? Who are the support groups? and Do principals and teachers share decision making responsibilities? (DB)

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Informed and Reasoning Citizens: An Interdisciplinary Matter

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An Examination of the Concept Informed and Reasoned Citizenship

A clear definition for an informed and reasoning citizen is hard to come by. This difficulty hinges on changes in the normative expectations of citizenship across time and alternative meanings that grow out of competitive ideologies. For some citizenship takes the form of a loyal and law abiding citizen. "My country right or wrong" may serve to symbolize this orientation. For others, citizenship is an informed and critical orientation that individuals bring to the examination of public affairs—an orientation that may or may not be supportive of established authority or prevailing views. This latter view is the one embraced by this author. It is the one that has characterized the literature associated with reflective inquiry in social studies education for several decades.^{1 2 3 4}

For those who advance this goal vigorously, and a small, but significant, group of educators do, the vision of an informed and reasoning citizen suggests learning experiences featuring a combination of content and process that is not evident in curricula designed for other purposes or in most secondary social studies programs as currently practiced. (I believe this observation is true of science programs as well.)

From the point of view of this author, content and process need to be viewed as an inseparable whole. However, for purposes

of clarification they will be handled separately in much of the following discussion.

CONTENT

Using the term, content, in the sense of subject matter, we advance the notion that the most important "subject matter" for future citizens is that needed in the study of significant social problems. While all of the world's problems cannot be studied, future citizens can engage in significant learning experiences where they probe selected issues. The study of such compelling problems could include:

What can be done to minimize world hunger?

What policies should govern the use of technology to prolong life?

What kind of an energy policy should the U.S. follow?

What policies most effectively respond to the AIDS epidemic?

When real social issues become the content focus of the curriculum, the need for information and insights from a variety of disciplines becomes clear.¹ The examples given above all draw upon such scientific fields such as biology, chemistry, and the physical sciences. However, the public policy side of these examples taps historical perspectives, political science,

economics, law, ecology, and sociology. Furthermore, deep insights can come from literature, and often from art and music.

Such combinations of knowledge are complex, they are more like the layers of an onion than a linear chronology or a logical outline. Yet, that is the stuff of public affairs. It is not crisp, cut and dry. It is messy, complex, tentative and uncertain. Nonetheless, these issues require illumination from many fields of study. Each issue will call for a different combination. No complex social condition can be fully explained or understood by any single discipline be it history, philosophy, chemistry, or law. Informed, reasoning citizens struggling to reach their own defensible conclusions, recognize the interdisciplinary nature of the issues confronted. They must also receive the strongest preparation possible by way of learning experiences that are as symmetrical as possible to the challenges of public life.

To put it another way, neither political science alone nor geography, nor even history are sufficient in and of themselves to assist citizens with the all of the vagaries of public life. It is only when carefully combined and orchestrated that such disciplines shift from being storehouses of knowledge to being authentically useful to those wishing to understand and improve local, national, or global conditions.

PROCESS

The informed, reasoning citizen envisioned here not only knows about public issues, they have also had experience explaining them, identifying and examining alternative solutions, making predictions about the future, clarifying and justifying their positions, and advancing and persuading others of their point of view. In brief, they have learned to be thinking, reasoning individuals who have the capacity to influence public life on the basis of a reflective and informed position.

Given this view of the intellectual process inherent to this curriculum, one where reasoning abilities and a commitment to in-depth explanation of problems and issues are inextricably intertwined with the content, the study of these social issues necessarily integrates these two dimensions. Indeed these processes become a meaningful part of the content. Learning how to raise questions, to gather evidence, to evaluate, to identify assumptions, to challenge arguments, to take a position and defend it, all represent learning that should emerge from a curriculum with a social issues focus that fosters informed and reasoning citizens.

INTEGRATION ACROSS DISCIPLINES

While far from fully implemented, in today's curricula, this goal of reasoning and informed citizens has nonetheless received persistent attention in the educational literature predating works of John Dewey. This long-standing goal, informed and reasoning citizenship, offers both vision and direction for curriculum development. It also provides guidance for teacher preparation, for school practices, and for educational research. Such vision-driven perspectives entail holistic views of the future. To work effectively to achieve an informed and reasoning citizenry requires insights and wisdom from all of human experience. While the disciplines are important sources of related understandings, a discipline - driven curriculum that relies solely on any one of them or views them as separate and distinct ingredients in the development of curriculum practices, is unlikely to be sufficient to address the challenges of citizenship. A key question, rather, is how can the disciplines best contribute to the realization of this goal.

Those seeking to prepare informed and reasoning citizens need to address such questions as:

What knowledge is needed?

What skills?

What values are needed to support this vision?

What can the various disciplines contribute?

What is the appropriate pedagogical response to fulfill this goal?

A vision-driven curriculum contrasts sharply with the view that curriculum building is a matter of dividing instructional time among the separate academic disciplines. In this case, the goal is to teach specified content from the particular discipline - to teach history, to teach physics, or to teach government. In practice, such curricula typically transmit knowledge as a fixed or established entity rather than one characterized by tentativeness or ambiguity and which presents competing interpretations, doubts, or controversies within existing disciplines. Nor do they focus on the desired attributes to be learned by the learner. When the decisions surrounding curriculum development are based solely on the preferences of scholars who represent particular specialties, the results are likely to look backward to the past at what has been learned (which is clearly subject to change in the future) at the neglect of emphasizing controversial and future-oriented public issues that represent the essence of the challenge facing concerned citizens.

The goal of informed and reasoning citizenship requires a focus on persistent human issues across time - past, present, and future. Could the rampant ignorance displayed by most citizens

regarding recent Persian Gulf issues have been mediated if the general education of citizens had, at some point, focused on the competing demands on the world's oil supply or the historic tensions between Moslems and Jews? Or, if citizens had had vigorous experiences in examining social issues. Certainly, the likelihood of a more sophisticated citizenry would appear to be considerably greater had their education been responsive to a future-oriented vision of the role of citizens.

While this claim cannot be proved, it seems reasonable to posit that a curriculum that gives attention to such enduring issues - ones that are persistent and enduring across time - are far more likely to cultivate an informed and reasoning citizen.

The understandings and skills needed to make judgements about the Gulf War requires insights and perspectives from many disciplines. This complex situation does not respect disciplinary boundaries. Instead, the study of this issue would combine the study of selected aspects of economics, of history, of geology, of geography, of religious studies, of anthropology, of women's studies and of literature. Taken together, these specialties can provide background material, and contribute to an incisive analysis, and can facilitate informed citizen decision making. However, merely collecting knowledge and data from a variety of disciplines is not sufficient to the complex responsibilities of citizenship in a global age.

Content and process must be joined in attaining the goal of informed and reasoning citizenship. While reliable sources of knowledge are essential, indeed crucial, for a curriculum that prepares informed citizens, so is the fostering of the intellect, of decision-making, of value analysis and of skills of political influence. Indeed, these processes can well be viewed as an integral dimension of the content of the curriculum rather than categorized as dichotomous with content. If informed and reasoning citizens are to learn how to discern and examine assumptions, weigh competing points of view, mount a compelling argument, evaluate evidence, their education needs to integrate these processes inextricably with understandings drawn from related specialty areas or disciplines as applied to social issues.

However compelling such a vision may be to some educators, efforts to implement compatible curriculum reforms have faced many difficulties and few reformers have realized their goals. They have failed for a variety of reasons. During an era characterized by the knowledge explosion, by uncertainty, by increasing contacts with diverse peoples and cultures, the strength of the argument for an issue-oriented, interdisciplinary curriculum that emphasizes intellectual development and political skills, has intensified. Yet, at the same time, it appears that the constraints that limit this possibility loom ever larger. It is as if many educators believe that preserving traditional

educational practices will insulate us from the fear of the uncertain, unknown future.

Challenges to Implementation

A. Community-parent and special interest groups

During the last decade, both community influences and parents have called for more rigorous academic standards, for back to the basics, for schools whose students earn strong SAT scores, for teachers that run a tight ship and even, for more homework. The political and social climate is widely evident in parent and community groups who challenge textbooks, literature, and classroom practices.'

This atmosphere of caution, censorship and control runs counter to organizing curriculum around significant and often controversial social issues where young people will be challenged to some independent thinking.

For too many parents, community members, and even educators learning consists mainly of the mundane and "safe" memorization of knowledge. In spite of democratic values that we seemingly embrace such as the centrality of self-government to this democracy, the citizens of this society

often do not exhibit the qualities associated with self-government, nor do they seem concerned if schools work to insure that the next generation has learned them. The nonchalance of both the public and the educational community presents itself as a major threat the implementation of more thoughtful curricula.

B. Teacher Preparation

How teachers are prepared is critically important. No curriculum innovation can be successful if teachers do not feel at ease with related content and pedagogical processes. However, before teacher education is viewed as a barrier to interdisciplinary curriculum, teachers need to be seen in the context of a hierarchical social system, in which they play out their professional roles where they enjoy little, if any, empowerment. A spate of teacher socialization studies confirm the very strong influence of the work setting over the attitudes and behavior of teachers during their first few years of teaching.' ' As pre-service teachers make the transition from the university to field placements, in particular to student teaching, and to their first year of teaching, their performance is increasingly shaped by the practices and values of the school. Consequently, it seems fair to conclude that unless the values and practices advocated here are supported in teacher

education programs, as well as in school settings, little curricular change will occur.

While the practices of the school as a social system can be challenged so can the practices of higher education in preparing teachers. It is hardly necessary to document the effect of how one has been taught on how one teaches. Yet, the bulk of general education coursework required of teacher education majors across this nation is almost entirely in the lecture-recite-quiz mode. Much of what is learned is at the memorization level. Students report minimal efforts to engage them in analyzing, inquiring or deciding, "No one ever asked for my opinion before" one college senior recently reported. Practices in professional education are not much better. Too often, methods courses are taught in the lecture mode, few demonstrations occur, little analysis of assumptions underlying teaching models takes place and future teacher's maintains passive roles where the level of intellectual challenge is low.

Moreover, courses or units crossing disciplinary lines are infrequent at the university-both within and outside the school or department of education. The number of times a methods course in science and social studies have ever been combined must be few indeed. With little modeling of interdisciplinary combinations or of challenging

intellectual teaching and learning practices, it is not surprising that the effects of one or two methods courses that might both model and address the necessary teaching and learning dimensions for interdisciplinary programs are easily snuffed out as first year teachers enter the school program."

C. The Challenges of Combining Content and Process

Most teachers deliver information in an expository mode. In short, they lecture. They may show films, invite guest speakers, have students read textbooks, and they deliver expositions of content that may or may not be effective, interesting, or dynamic. All of these practices expose students to information, none of them ensure that students will make meaning of what is presented or be able to apply knowledge to compelling problems. The role of teacher as information-giver is well-entrenched in the public mind as well as in the minds of most teachers before they enroll in professional courses or begin their first year of teaching.

In others words, teaching in any other mode runs counter to their experiences as found in many years of schooling at both the K-12 and collegiate levels. In sharp contrast teaching that supports the development of informed

and reasoning citizens calls for a distinctly different role - one that may be described as inquiry-oriented, as facilitative, as democratic. This role calls for a dramatic change in teacher role. Of particular interest are concepts of control, authority, and expertise. These three concepts characterize much conventional teaching. Teachers control the classroom, its rules, its subject matter, and its learning activities. Students are talked to rather than talked with. The teacher is the sole authority figure, exercising relatively unchallengeable authority over all classroom decisions and assuming the role of expert in terms of the subject matter. Students, it is hoped will be passive, compliant and acquiescent. The kind of teaching called for here - teaching that is more facilitative and interactive calls, instead, for shared control with students, shared authority and shared expertise with students. Operationally, this means that students and teachers negotiate classroom conditions such as rules of conduct, selection of content and class activities, as well as has means of evaluation and grading.

These contrasting demands call for teachers to peel away a habitual way of thinking about teaching. Yet, models of teachers who represent a more inquiry-oriented mode are hard to find. Moreover, for the new teacher, needed support to experiment with new ways of teaching may not be

forthcoming. In fact, there can be resistance, suspicion, and even opposition from others (teachers and principals) in the school environment. The degree of receptivity in the school climate is a critical feature of implementing a mode of teaching that represents a distinct point of departure from conventional practice.

So far, this discussion has focused on novice teachers. Clearly, experienced teachers represent a distinctly different case. In the best of schools, teachers workload is still excessive (averages of 175 students per day are common), teacher burnout is extant, and teachers enjoy few opportunities for professional decision making. These factors seriously mitigate against the promise of fostering enthusiasm for serious and demanding reforms.

D. Student Expectations

While it may be the intent of new curriculum frameworks to serve students more purposefully, all students may not recognize or appreciate the changes advanced in their behalf and the way these changes will alter their academic lives. In fact, as curricula serve an increasingly broader range of students, the more difficult it is for any single curricular framework to respond to all students. Diversity, in this

instance refers not only to those who are racially diverse, ethnically diverse, or religiously diverse. While those conditions deserve serious attention, it is the diversity of social class with its profound effect on hopes; on aspirations, and most importantly, on the chances for shaping one's destiny that conditions student orientations toward the curriculum and places limits on the potential of any framework.

The nature of the student population alters the nature of teaching and learning most significantly. Those who advance interdisciplinary curricula would do well to involve students from all walks of life in all stages of planning.

E. Student Learning Gains

School administrators, parents, teachers and students look to conventional indicators of school success - grades, class standing, achievement tests, S.A.T. scores. However, flawed these indicators are, for many they serve as testimony regarding whether students have learned.

Conventional assessment measures do not usually tap the complex intellectual tasks associated with a curriculum fostering informed and reasoning citizens. While teacher-made tests or challenging class projects¹¹ can be designed

in responsive ways, the approval of these efforts needs to be conducted with teachers and students setting standards and ratings jointly.

The kinds of assessment useful in a reflective classroom include, but are not limited to, written essays, position papers, photographic essay, dramatizations, slide-tape presentations and the like. Recently, the concept of authentic evaluation has been advanced that would connect all class projects with the real world. For example, after a study of air pollution in the local community, a class committee creates a report illustrated by photographs which is presented to the city's planning commission. In other words the project is directed to a live-audience in the community. In this way, it is not merely an assignment-to-get-a grade but has potential for influencing others. Such appraisal of student work is likely to be more intrinsically motivating since it may be viewed by students as significant in the adult world.

Considerations for Implementation

The first part of this paper proposes a vision-driven curriculum for citizenship. The last part turn its attention to the nature of the environment where reform would take place.

Unfortunately no research-based formula exists to assure success in implementation. Settings for reform are idiosyncratic and even if a formula existed, its applicability would be limited. What can help all of those wishing to realize a curriculum for informed and reasoning citizens are some guiding questions that assist in analyzing the nature of the proposed reform as well as the environment. Failure to carefully appraise the social and political environment in which curriculum decisions are made and implemented can inhibit the realization of the vision-driven curriculum described herein."

Central to creating and implementing this curriculum is the capacity to appraise the system regarding its potential for acceptance. Examining and answering such questions as the following can be particularly useful.

1. Who influences curricular decisions?
2. What settings (faculty meetings, PTA's, department meetings, school board meetings, etc.) already exist for exerting influences?
3. When are crucial decisions made?

Finding out who the gatekeepers are as well as who is or is not likely to support this curriculum is fundamental. The answers provide a major indicator of the likelihood of success as well as preview of the challenge that reformers must address.

Furthermore, identifying settings and times where decisions are either shaped or made and planning to influence existing opportunities is a strategy that is both more efficient and effective than creating new settings for decisionmaking.

Such curriculum influences as the community, special interests, the principal, teachers, students and scholars can have reactions that range from enthusiastic support to vehement opposition to abject indifference. Scholars and or teachers with subject matter specialties can offer distinctive service in behalf of curriculum reform. At the same time, it must be remembered that academicians who represent disciplines or other specialties are given to the advancement of their self-interest. Not surprisingly, they tend to think of their specialization and expertise as intrinsically valuable for any one who can enhance the intellectual frameworks of all who come to sample that facet of study.

A fitting example is found in the recent work of the National Commission for the Social Studies.¹¹ Led by a well known historian, William H. McNeill, it included among its members, at least five persons who were heavily grounded in the study of history. Not surprisingly, the Commission issued a report, ostensibly a "social studies curriculum for the 21st Century" in which history plays the paramount role over and above all other disciplines. It is worth noting that in any group of

social scientists and historians it is historians that are likely to prevail. It is they who preserve tradition, it is they who often recommend the conventional, - and therefore the comfortable. Furthermore, it is they who can, when functioning narrowly (and not all of them do so), prevent the curriculum from embracing a broader issue-oriented interdisciplinary framework.

2. What facilitators and what constraints in institutional settings (the school or the university) can inhibit or enhance an issue-oriented, interdisciplinary curriculum. Probing the questions below can place the hopeful curriculum reformer on more informed ground.

1. Are teachers prepared to initiate and implement such a curriculum?
2. What opportunities exist for teachers to acquire needed insights and experience?
3. Who are the resisters? Who are the support groups?
4. Who are the opinion leaders in the setting? What views do they hold?
5. Does the principal function as a curriculum leader?

6. Does the principal support this effort?
7. Do principals and teacher share decision making responsibilities?
8. Do students participate in significant school decision making?
9. Is the school climate student-oriented?
10. To what extent do classrooms reflect an open climate where ideas are expressed freely?
11. Is the library adequately equipped to permit students pursue the study of public issues that involve both natural and social study?

This list is only illustrative, but any group of curriculum reformers would be well served to assess the facilitators and constraints that operate in the settings where they wish to realize an interdisciplinary curriculum. In addition it is important to capitalize on parallel trends, development, and projects that promote interdisciplinary learning (e.g. A.S.C.D., Science for 2061).

Interdisciplinary curriculum reform is challenging work. It is not for the faint-hearted. Given the nature of traditional curricula, one is likely to find considerable resistance. However, if educators are committed to the realization of a vision-driven curriculum for the next generation of citizens, the challenges, whatever they may be, deserve our best efforts.

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